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EARNEST INVITATION

TO THE

THRONE OF GRACE:

OR, THE

Saint's Duty and Exercise.

WHEREIN IS LAID DOWN

Some quickening motives for the stirring up of Sinners, both to family and secret Prayer; with directions how to pray and give thanks to God in public and private; and some encouragements to fervent hearty Prayer. Together with the great danger of living in the neglect of so necessary a duty.

By the Rev. MR. ROBERT RUSSEL,
Minister of the Gospel at *Wadhurst* in *Sussex*.

ACTS ii. 21.

*Whosoever shall call on the Name of the Lord
shall be saved.*

G L A S G O W,
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M D C C X C I.



AN EARNEST INVITATION TO THE THRONE OF GRACE.

I THES. v. 17. *Pray without ceasing.*

Dear and loving Friends,

NOW in treating this point concerning prayer, I shall endeavour, *First*, To shew what prayer is. *Secondly*, What it is to pray continually. *Thirdly*, To shew some reasons why we ought to pray without ceasing. And, *Lastly*, To make application.

First, What prayer is. In short, prayer is an earnest, fervent offering up of our desires to God, by faith in the name of Jesus Christ, for those good things that are agreeable to God's will, and our own necessity. Now, there must concur these two things to make up the duty of prayer, *First*, An earnest and fervent desire after those graces and blessings we come to God for; for there are some that come frequently to the throne of grace, and offer a form of words in a praying way: I say, a form of words either composed ready to hand, or else of their own composing; and so they come to God with an expression of words, without any hearty desires after those graces and mercies they seem to pray for; but their desires run out after other things, after their lusts, their covetousness, and after the things of this world; and yet they will seem to pray mightily against sin and fleshly lusts, which they have no desire to be rid of; and for the obtaining of those graces and spiritual mercies

which they are not sensible of their want of, nor have any desire to attain: but yet they will often make use of prayer, either as a veil to hide and cover their nakedness, and to shew themselves to the world to be religious, or else as a device to quiet their conscience in a course of sin, and so they make confession of sin to stand instead of forsaking of sin, and praying instead of repenting. Now, such kind of praying is abominable unto the Lord; yea, this kind of praying is indeed no praying, but only a babbling, dissembling, and mocking of God; yea, it is a lying unto God. *Ephraim*, saith God, *compasseth me about with lies*, Hos. ii. 5. 12. Hypocrites do not pray, but instead of praying they tell lies unto God, they make as if they had a desire to know God, to love and obey God, to be holy and heavenly, when indeed they have no heart nor desire to any such thing. Of this sort were the scribes and Pharisees, as Christ complains against them, Mat. xv. 7. 8. *Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honour-eth me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.* Yea, there is a sad woe pronounced against such, Mat. xxiii. 14. *Wo unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers; therefore, you shall receive the greater damnation.* This is the first concurrence to make up the duty of prayer, which is a hearty and fervent desire after those graces and good things we pretend to pray for, without

which our praying is no praying, but babbling and mocking of God. 2dly, The other concurrence to make up the duty is this. An offering up of our desires either with the mind or voice, our having these desires alone is not praying; but where there are hearty fervent desires after grace and mercy, and these desires are expressed either by sighing, groaning, whispering, speaking, or by voice; this is praying indeed; and this shall be sufficient to shew what prayer is. 3dly, The next thing I promised to shew is, What it is to pray without ceasing: Now, to pray without ceasing is, not to do like unto that sect, who thought that prayer was to be their whole business. No, no: There are other duties which God hath required; and prayer must not come in the way of other duties to shuffle them out. But, in general, to pray without ceasing implies, a taking hold of, and improving all those seasons and opportunities wherein God and our own necessities, call us to prayer; this is to pray without ceasing. It is said of Mephibosheth, *That he did eat continually at the king's table*, 2 Sam. ix. 13. Now, what shall we understand from this? Shall we think that he did nothing else, day or night, but eat? No such matter; but he was always present at meals, when the season of meal time came: Even so, to pray without ceasing, is to pray always, whensoever prayer is seasonable. But more particularly, to pray without ceasing implies, 1. A being always in a disposition and frame to pray whensoever God requires it: The

heart must be reconciled to this duty of prayer, and fall in love with it, and come to the throne of grace with delight ; and also a continually resisting of that backwardness and indisposition to prayer, whenever the season of prayer approacheth, and always to watch our hearts to keep them in a praying frame. 2. To pray without ceasing implies, a praying in every state and condition of life it pleaseth God to call us to ; for without prayer sickness will be un sanctified, and health will be a judgement. Without prayer health and prosperity will be a snare, and will occasion a forgetfulness of God, and a daring to rebel against him, and will serve to encourage a neglect of the soul, and of another world ; and without prayer, adversity will be intolerable, and if it be removed, it will be in anger ; and that no condition should cause a neglect of prayer. 3. To pray without ceasing implies, a persevering in prayer, a continual wrestling with God in prayer, and never to give over until we have our request granted. God, in his wisdom, is pleased sometimes to cause us stay long for a mercy, before it comes ; both to make the mercy the sweeter to us when it comes, and also for the trial of his people's patience, whether they will persevere and continue waiting at the throne of grace. And those that are true believers will be content to wait, and to wait in God's way until their prayers be granted : So did the woman of Canaan, when she came to Christ for mercy. Tho' at her first suit Christ gave her no answer at all, yet

she, notwithstanding, continued her suit with more earnestness, crying after him : and when Christ did speak, yet he gave her a seeming denial, and told her, that he was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And yet she would not give over, but cried again for help ; but yet, instead of helping her, he called her a dog, and told her, *That it was not meet to take the children's bread and cast it unto dogs.* Then, instead of leaving off her suit, she came to Christ with great humility, she acknowledged her own unworthiness of mercy ; but she despaired not, but, by faith, pleaded Christ's mercy and bounty, telling him, *Tho' I be a dog, and not worthy to be made a partaker of the children's bread, yet the dogs may eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table.* This shews how thankful she would have been for the least crumbs of mercy ; whereupon Jesus Christ immediately commended the greatness of her faith, and, as it were, gave her the key of his treasure, and bade her take whatsoever she wanted, whether mercy for herself, or mercy for her daughter. *O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt.* Further, that we might be encouraged to persevere in prayer, without fainting, Christ records us this parable, to the end that men ought always to pray without fainting. Luke viii 1. &c. I desire you to take your bibles and read the place at your leisure. Friends, tho' you pray, seek and wait long for power against your corruptions, for assurance, and for the sense of God's love, even to the end

of your days; yet, if you can but overcome at last, and get safe to heaven, that will make amends for all your praying, waiting, labouring and suffering. O therefore, let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due time we shall reap if we faint not, Gal. vi. 9. Thus have I shewed what prayer is, and what it is to pray without ceasing. 3dly, The next thing is to give some reasons why it is the duty and work of every Christian to pray without ceasing. 1. We should pray continually, because God is always ready to hear; and tho' God knows our wants, and is ready at all times to bestow upon us whatsoever we want; yet the Lord, in his wisdom, would have us wait upon him by fervent prayer, for those spiritual good things we want; not that prayer moves God, but that continual fervent prayer makes us fit to receive the mercy we came unto him for; for, if God should bestow his especial saving mercy upon a sinner before he is fit for it, the mercy would be but little prized by him, and God would have but little return of praise and thanks from him. Therefore, for this reason, God will be sought unto for his especial mercies before he will bestow them. After God had promised to pardon, renew, and to heal Israel, yet he appoints prayer as the means to bring down these mercies, before he will bestow it upon them. Ezek. xxxvi. 37. *For all these I will be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do this for them.* Consider friends, pardon is ready, and already purchased for you by the blood of Christ: Grace is ready, and mercy

is ready to embrace you sinners. God waits but for your seeking unto him for these mercies, and you shall have them; therefore, if you perish for ever, for want of these saving mercies, the fault is not in God, but in yourselves, because you will not seek unto God, by hearty prayer, for grace and mercy. *God is said to look down from heaven to see if there were any that would seek after God*, Psal. xiv. 2. And he is ready to pardon, justify, sanctify and save them, whensoever they seek unto him. Friends, a hearty seeking of God never was in vain, nor ever will be. 2dly, We must pray without ceasing, continually; because Christ is continually praying for us. Christ prayed night and day for us when he was upon earth, even until he was in an agony; and now he is in heaven, and makes continual intercession for us. Heb. vii. 25. Christ in heaven is always presenting to his Father his suffering, and by his sufferings and blood shed, all that we pray for has been purchased; the blood of Jesus cries in God's ears in behalf of those that pray, that the curse that Christ hath borne may be removed from them, that the sins for which Christ was wounded may be forgiven them, that out of his fulness they may receive grace for grace; and that, for his sake, they may be delivered from the wrath to come. Now, friends, shall Christ pray for us so long, and so fervently, until he was in agony, and still prays for us in heaven, and yet shall we lose the benefit of all for want of praying for ourselves: O for shame! seeing Christ doth

his part, let us do ours. 3dly, We should pray without ceasing, because the Spirit is always ready to help our infirmities, Rom. viii. The Spirit is ready to instruct us what to pray for; as to remove the load of indisposition to this duty, to quicken our deadness in the duty, to enlarge our desires after grace, and strengthen us to wrestle for a blessing; and truly God is not to be prevailed with, but by the mediation of his Son, and by the help and assistance of his Holy Spirit. 4thly, We must pray continually, because Satan is always ready to assault us; he is said, *To go about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*, 1 Pet. v. 8. Satan is never idle, he is always following us with snares and temptations: Our life is full of temptations; and shall not we be continually praying against Satan and his assaults. Wicked spirits are continually engaged against us. *We wrestle*, saith the Apostle, *with principalities and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places*. Eph. vi. 12. These enemies are invisible, and, therefore, it is the more difficult to withstand them; they are too subtile and too strong for us; we had need therefore, to pray without ceasing, seeing they cease not endeavouring to bring us both to sin and ruin.

Fifthly and lastly, We should pray without ceasing, because our corruption quickly gets strength upon the least neglect of prayer; if by our watching, praying and wrestling with God, we have got some strength and power against our corruptions, as anger, pride, co-

vetousness, fleshly lusts, sensuality, and our affections are moved and inflamed towards God and heavenly things, and we are got into a state of grace; yet, if we once let down our watch, and neglect prayer, our corruptions will yet strengthen again, and our graces will decay, and our love to God and holy things will decay: Now, all these things considered, we might see that it is necessary for us to take care that we be not careless, flight, and negligent, in our performing this duty of prayer, but to stir up ourselves in the performance of this duty, and to pray without ceasing. Thus I have done with the doctrinal part; but before I proceed, I shall answer an objection or two, which may ly in my way.

One objection, which some may make, is this, Whether they ought to pray with a form: Some there be that hold with a form of prayer, and some are against it.

Now, in answering this objection, I shall endeavour to reconcile both parties. You must know there are two kinds of prayer commanded by God. First, public or family prayer. Secondly, secret prayer. For the first of these, if it be about public or family prayer, and you are the speaker, it is most convenient for you to pray in a set form of words, suited to the general necessities of those that join with you, and which are suited to the sins and wants of mankind in general throughout the world. Such forms as these are already composed by many eminent Divines: I say, in public or family prayer, it is most convenient to pray in

such a set composed form of words, that those who join with you, being acquainted with your matter, may with more readines go along with you in your expressions. And, as for the lawfulness of these forms, consider that Christ hath given us a set form of prayer, which is the Lord's prayer; now this form Christ hath given us, both to be a rule and pattern to direct us in prayer, and also to be used in our prayers. The command of Christ Mat. vi. is in these words, *After this manner pray ye*; this is to teach us, that the Lord's prayer is given us not only to be used as a form, but also to be a rule for directing us to pray according to that pattern. But in Luke xi. the command of Christ is in these words, *When you pray say, our Father, &c.* This is also to teach us, that the Lord's prayer is used, not only as a pattern or rule, but also as a form to be at the end of our public or family prayers.

To conclude this, Writers record, that forms were used when our Saviour Christ was on earth; and that Christ joined with them. And yet Christ neither contradicted these forms, nor blamed them for using them; therefore, if your objections be against public or family prayer, I have sufficiently answered that. But, Secondly, If your objection be against secret prayer, I shall soon resolve you in that. If you ask, whether you ought to pray in secret by a form? This is the same thing as if you should ask whether a man ought to make use of his legs, or make use of crutches to walk with? For you all know, that if a man be

lame and cannot use his legs, he must walk by crutches until he have the use of his legs, and then he afterwards ought to use his legs, and fling his crutches aside; even so, those that have hitherto been strangers to prayer, and also to themselves, who are weak, and have not yet attained unto the gift of prayer, and therefore they know not how to pray, these ought to pray by a form, and to make use of such forms as may lead them to the knowledge of their own particular sins and wants, so as to confess them: their own corruptions and inclinations, so as to lament over them; their own temptations, so as to pray against them; also their own wants, that they may beg of God to have them supplied: Then they ought no longer to use a form, but to lay it aside, as useless, because they are able to express their own particular wants without it. And besides, there are no written forms of prayer that can suit with the case of every particular christian; for one christian is under one circumstance, and another under another, therefore every one ought to study his own sins, temptations and wants, and then fall to prayer, according as he finds his own condition to be: But, for a man under whatsoever circumstance he be, yet for him to use a form, it is a sign he prays for he knows not what. To give you an instance or two: Suppose you were a condemned malefactor, and were going to the king to beg a pardon, you would not need a written form of words to carry with you, for your own condition would teach

you what to say when you came there. Or, suppose a beggar should come to your doors in a miserable condition, ready to starve for hunger, you would soon hear how hard he would beg, what complaints he will make, and what arguments he will use to move your pity, without a written form of words. Even so, if you have but a true sight and sense of your sin and misery, and of your want of such and such soul mercies, you would not need a written form to teach you what to say to God when you come to the throne of grace. Thus, I hope, I have sufficiently satisfied you, in answering this objection, whether we ought to pray by a set form or not?

But now to answer one objection more, and that is, whether a wicked man may pray or not, seeing the Scriptures tell us, *That the prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord*. I answer, That a wicked man, however, ought to pray, because, whilst he is praying, he is using one of God's ordinances, and who knows but it may please God to bless it to him, for the good of his soul, and bring him to pray for it in his heart. And besides, there is no wicked man but he has now and then some good desires wrought in him by the common workings of God's Spirit, and these desires he ought to express to God by prayer, and so far his prayers will be accepted; and so he may be fitted for the work of grace to be wrought in him, and God has promised, that they who draw near to him, he will draw near to them. But if he wholly cast off prayer, he goes further

from God, and so runs the high road to hell and destruction. Thus having done with the doctrinal part, and answered these objections, I come now to the application. The first use shall be an use of lamentation. If it be such a necessary duty of every Christian to pray without ceasing, then what shall we think of those who never pray, neither with their families nor yet in secret? They mind nothing but the things of the world, and the lust of the flesh, but never seek after God: Sure these must be in a sad miserable condition. This is a lamentation, and must be for a lamentation.

Secondly, The next use shall be of caution; let us be cautioned against these two things. 1st, Let us take heed of a form of dull, careless and heartless performance of this duty of prayer. Now that this may be avoided, take heed of rushing unpreparedly into God's presence. But if you shall ask, How shall I do to prepare myself aright for this duty of prayer? I answer, If you would pray so as your prayers would be accepted and granted, you must follow these directions. 1st, Before you go to prayer, study the knowledge of yourselves; examine how the case stands between God and your own souls, which way your desires run; and if you find that your desires run heavenwards, then examine the matter of your desires, what it is you would have God to do for you; study your sins, wants, and what corruptions you desire to be rid of, and what graces you would have God bestow upon you. If you do not acquaint yourselves with your case

before hand, you cannot expect to know it aright on a sudden, as you go to pray ; if you do not actually look into your hearts and lives before you go to prayers, your souls will be unhumbled, and want that lively sense of your necessities which must put life into your prayers. Before you pray, consider what sin is, what God's wrath and hell is, and what lusts and corruptions are in you, and what grace and mercy you stand in need of. And this will make you pray, and pray to purpose, with all your hearts. But when men are wilful strangers unto themselves, and never look back, nor inwards, to see what is amiss and wanting, nor look forward to see the danger that is before them, no wonder if their hearts are dead and dull ; and they are as unfit to pray as a sleeping man is to work. 2dly, As you go to prayer, beware of sinful thoughts that they do not come in and spoil the duty : To this end watch your heart, your thoughts and your affections very carefully, otherwise some beloved vanity will alienate them from the work in hand, and it will turn away your thoughts, and possess your affections, so that you will want them when you should use them in prayer : If the mind be set on other things, prayer will be a heartless, lifeless thing : Alas, how dead and pitiful is the prayer of him that hath his heart ensnared with the love of money, pleasure, or any lustful desires ? The thoughts will easily follow the affections. 3dly, When you come to God by prayer, come in such humility as becometh a sinner ; and

yet in the faith and boldness that beseemeth a member of the Lord Jesus Christ ; do not conceive any conceit of any worthiness in yourselves, yet beware of any despairing thoughts in prayer, but be as confident in every lawful request you ask, as if you saw your glorified Redeemer interceding for you with his Father ; faith and hope is the life of prayer, and Christ is the life of hope ; if you pray, and think you shall never be the better for praying, your prayers shall have but little life ; therefore, let a crucified and glorified Christ be always before your eyes in prayer ; not in a picture, but in the thoughts of a believing mind. See what the apostle saith to the Hebrews, Heb. iv. 14, 15, 16. *We have a high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, that was in all points tempted as we are, and yet without sin. Let us come therefore boldly to the throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need.* Also, Heb. vii. 25. *He is able to save to the utmost them that come unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.* Yea, we have a gracious promise by Christ himself for our encouragement, John xiv. 13. *If you ask any thing in my name, I will do it.*

4thly, Labour hard with your hearts all the time you are praying, to keep them in a reverend, serious, fervent frame, and suffer them not to grow remiss and cold, to turn prayer into lip-labour, or into lifeless formality ; the heart may be senseless, tho' the voice seem to be earnest ; therefore, the heart must be care-

fully watched, and diligently stirred up. A cold prayer shews a cold heart in desiring that which is prayed for; and therefore, it is unfit to receive the mercy. God will make you know that his mercies are not contemptible, but worthy of your most earnest prayers. 5thly, In the last place, the other caution I shall lay before you is this: After you have done prayer, take heed of contenting yourselves with the bare performance of the duty, thinking that your work is done, when prayer is over; but carefully examine how you have sped in prayer; examine how your thoughts have been, and in what frame your hearts have been, whilst you have been praying, and then watch for a return of prayer. A great many pray, and when they have done, they never think of their prayers again; and this is the cause that makes many prayers to be lost; therefore, don't think you have done enough when you have done prayer, but watch for a return of prayer. David had been praying, and then he was resolved to hearken what the Lord would speak, Psal. lxxxv. 8. So the church, believing that the Lord would hear, resolves to wait for him, Mic. vii. 7. *Therefore will I look to the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.* Friends, If you do not watch for return of prayer, you do not consider what you do, or whom you have to do with in prayer. When you pray, you engage in an ordinance, and shall that be used in vain? you are therefore to stand upon your watch tower, and to observe, with the

prophet, what God saith to you, Hab. ii. 1. That is the second use. 3dly, The third and last use shall be of exhortation : And my exhortation shall be for the stirring you all up both to family and secret prayer. As for family prayer, O be persuaded, for the Lord's sake, for Christ's sake, who intercedes for you, and for your soul's sake, that you would make conscience of family prayer, not only in the evening, but every morning and evening : This is a duty that is most sadly neglected in this declining age, especially in inns and public houses, and such places, where people are incumbered with multitude of business about the things of the world and the flesh. O ! for the sake of your immortal souls, do not suffer your company, the business and delights of the world and the flesh, to rob you of God's love, and to ruin your body and soul in hell for ever. Friends, let me persuade you take this counsel, that what company soever is at your house, at a seasonable times, tell them thus : This is no time for you to be here ; it is time for you to be at home reading and praying in your families. But, if you cannot shake off your company and business in time, then do as Abraham did, Gen. xxii. 5. *Who saith to his young men, tarry you here, while I and the lad go yonder and worship.* So say to your company and business, and to your worldly thoughts, Tarry you here, while I and my family go yonder and worship God. Consider, friends, your souls are more worth than ten thousand worlds ; and you had better neglect

any thing in this world than neglect your souls. O let all the business of this world go whither it will, rather than lose heaven, for that will be a dreadful loss indeed. Alas! what a dreadful thing it is, that death and judgement should be so near, and eternity at the door, and yet there should be so few praying families! But, having said something for the persuading you to family-prayer, in my book of Joshua's resolution, I need to say no more of it here. Therefore, 2dly, Let me exhort you also to secret prayer; for it is to be feared that this is also very much neglected among us: nay, it is not only neglected among loose, profane sinners, but also, it is to be feared, it is sadly neglected by professors, and those that are constant performers of family duties; many that make conscience of praying in their families, both night and morning, yet follow them to their chambers or closets, and you shall see nothing of secret prayer. Friends, I can tell you, and that by woeful experience too, that to pray aright is the hardest work in religion, and that by reason of the many oppositions, pull-backs, and hinderances to this duty. Friends, secret prayer is the greatest enemy the devil has; he cannot endure that people should go to pray in secret, because no duty can be more powerful for pulling down Satan's kingdom in the soul, and setting up the kingdom of Christ, than secret prayer is: The devil is well content that people should set about an outward duty of religion, as reading the scripture, hearing of ser-

mons, and praying in their families, so as all be done in a cold, formal, and lifeless way, without any great opposition; but for people to go and pour out their hearts to God in secret, confess their own particular sins and daily infirmities, bemoaning their case to God, bewailing their inbred corruptions, lamenting over a hard heart, a blind mind, a dead and dull spirit, a hearty begging of pardon, for deliverance from sin, for power against corruption, for strength against the evil lusting of the flesh, begging for grace and a new nature, and a new life; now this work, together with frequent meditation, and self-examination, these duties the devil opposeth with all his might. No weapons can be more strong for the rooting out of corruptions, for fighting against Satan, and overcoming of him, than these spiritual weapons. Friends, we have naturally a slothful, sluggish spirit, a dull and backward heart; the flesh craves its ease, the world with its profits and pleasures, and the flesh with its evil lustings; yea, and the devil he comes in, and makes use of all these for the opposing of us, for the keeping us off, and for the hindering of us in these secret duties. The devil is loth to let go his hold of the sinner, therefore he labours with all his might, if it be possible, to keep him in the chain of his sin: therefore there must be a great fighting against these enemies of souls, striving against these oppositions, and so a wrestling with God by secret prayer, and a taking of the kingdom of heaven by violence, if ever we mean to

come there. Consider, friends, that secret prayer, if fervent, is a striving against sin and corruption ; for whenever we are striving with God, we are striving against sin ; for duty and sin strive for the victory. While duty holds up, sin goes down ; but when duty flags, sin gets up. Secret prayer, if hearty, will make us weary of sinning ; or else sin will make us weary of praying : And if secret prayer be such a wearisomeness to us, it is a sad sign that sin gets the upper hand. There cannot be a more effectual way for a sinner to kill his sin, than by secret prayer : A sinner never fights against sin, with greater zeal, nor with greater success, than upon his knees, when once a sinner comes to kneel in earnest before God, his lusts must quickly kneel to him. Our confessing of sin, and laying it open before the Lord, our complaining to the Lord of it, our crying to the Lord against it, pressing him upon his promise, upon his covenant to help it ; these are the mightiest batteries for beating down the strong holds of sin. But where secret prayer is neglected, there the sinner lies open to all temptations, sin, lust, and uncleanness. O therefore be persuaded to be often and frequent in this duty of secret prayer. Friends, what do you say ? Will you mind and do this one thing, that is, to give yourselves unto secret prayer ? there is no exhortation ever will prosper with you, if this exhortation do not : It is in vain to persuade you to lead a holy life, if you do not live a praying life ? O be persuaded to be instant and constant in secret

prayer ; set your times for secret prayer, and keep your times, and make a firm resolution with yourselves to do it. I read of a godly divine, who had upon a time some conference with some of his hearers concerning the state of their souls ; they gave him some hopes of a work of grace begun in their hearts ; but then, upon inquiry, he found still a neglect of secret prayer, which cast such a damp upon his spirit, that it brought down his hopes to be as low as nothing. Friends, consider that secret prayer is the very life of religion, if it be sincere and fervent : And if you would but be persuaded to make true conscience of that, then there would be hopes indeed of the work of grace begun in you. Now, for the further stirring you up to the duty of secret prayer, consider but these four things. 1. Consider, that if you make conscience of secret prayer daily and frequently, this would be an evident sign of your uprightness and sincerity. It is a sign that you seek God, when none but God knows of your seeking him. He is not a true Christian that is one outwardly, but he is a true Christian inwardly, whose praise is not of men, but of God, Rom. ii. 28. 29. But he that lives in the neglect of secret duties, tho' he pass in the world for ever so good a Christian, yet he is, in God's account, no better than a hypocrite. 2. Consider, secret prayer is a marvellous way to thrive in grace, and to grow rich towards God. By this means, faith will grow exceedingly, our love to God will abound, our souls will prosper. A Christian

that is much in secret with God, O what benefit does he reap thereby! how good does he find God to be unto his soul! so that he can by experience say with the Psalmist, Psal. cxlv. 18. *That he is plenteous in mercy unto all that call upon him.* 3. Consider, that secret prayer is a means to fit you for public ordinances. Those that are most upon their knees in their chamber or closet, will receive most benefit in public; God must be sought unto in secret, to fit us for public worship. Those that, before they come to hear, pray earnestly, in secret, that the gospel may come to them, not in word only, but in power also, to bring down the strong holds of sin, and for building them up in grace and holiness, those are likely to find the gospel working effectually upon them, and that it is the power of God for their salvation, Rom. i. 16. Those that before they come to the Lord's Supper, examine themselves alone, beg that God would search them, and are importunate with God for strength against every corruption, as pride, covetousness, envy, anger, malice: also against a hard heart, sluggishness and dullness of spirit, disordered affections, self-love, sensuality, and the like; they also that beg for all the fruits of Christ's sufferings, and for all the graces of his Spirit, such as these are not like to be sent empty away. 1. Consider, secret prayer is a means to keep public duties upon the heart, after public exercise is ended. Your work is not done when public exercise is over; but you are immediately, as soon as you come home, to go alone,

and, in secret, to pray over the word which you have heard; thus, 1. Has any sin been laid open to you, wherein you know yourselves to be guilty; then confess it, beg pardon for it, strength against it, and resolve to set against it for the time to come. 2. Has any duty been pressed upon you in contemplation of God in secret, incline your heart to perform this duty. 3. Consider secret prayer is the way to have special tokens of God's love, and these joys that a stranger does not meddle with. O the sweet meltings and thawings of the heart for sin that the saints meet with in secret prayer! O the visits that the great Physician of souls does make to poor sinners in this duty! And O the inward joy, peace, and comfort, that the saints do meet with in their secret addresses to God by prayer! And, friends, should not this be a great encouragement to you to be frequent in secret prayer?

But if all this be not encouragement enough, consider, in the 6th and last place, That if you daily and frequently pray in secret, meditate & examine yourselves, and take pains with your own hearts in secret, God will reward you openly. This is the argument that Christ useth to enforce secret prayer, Mat. vi. 'When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and shut the door, and pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.' As secret sins shall be openly punished, so all secret duties shall be openly rewarded before men and angels at the last day.

F I N I S.

